

ROAD SAFETY REQUIRES A COORDINATED RESPONSE

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The more I read about efforts being launched to curb the 40 a day tally on our roads, the more enthused I become to see that there are so many people out there doing something, and who has taken to heart the fact that South Africa has undoubtedly, the highest road death rate per capita in the world. But this enthusiasm is a double-edged sword, because it also appears as if the things that are being done is not having the desired effect. In this article, I am speculating on the factors to be considered, and the questions we should be asking.



In any risk management scenario, the first question you need to answer is if you clearly understand the risk. There exists a fallacy within the human psyche that bad things only happen to others and that it will never happen to you or me. When it does, we appear to be totally incapable of accepting that something so terribly could have happened to us. Are we not the ones who take the most care? Do we not make an effort of driving carefully and safely? we are psychologically primed to accept the good and ignore the bad. It appears to me as if this psychology has found it's way through to many of the people who boldly proclaim to be the bastions in the fight against the carnage on our roads.

According to Arrive Alive, we are now losing 40 people a day. That is 280 people per week. It becomes too depressing to extrapolate that to an annual figure, and I will ask the reader to do that for him or herself. There has to be a clearly defined cause, or range of causes, for this terrible reality. I think it is time that we seriously sit down and define what those causes are, and what we are going to do to deal with them individually and collectively.



I wrote an article a few weeks ago about the various organizations involved in this effort on a national and provincial basis, and it pains me to state that for every one that I have mentioned in that article, there appears to be another one that supports the same principles. Only with dedicated research and an

inquisitive mind were I able to unearth from the depths of cyberspace, the other organizations that appear to also have the same goals. I will not list them, but will comment once again on the fact that there appears to be, from a public perspective, very little cooperation between these organizations that is having a measurable effect on road safety.

Will more aggressive policing and law enforcement do the trick? The answer is twofold. No, it will not make a difference to poor driving techniques by poorly trained drivers who obtained their driving permits via unscrupulous police officials who needs to make money on the side, or driving school operators who "assist" learner drivers in passing their drivers tests.



Secondly, increased policing is expensive and most municipalities and provincial authorities have what appears to be other, more pressing projects. Paying lip service to the scourge of police corruption is not going to resolve the issue. Poor staff management systems with extremely lenient or non-existent performance evaluation systems lies at the heart of corrupt activities within the law enforcement system. It has nothing to do with poor salaries and benefits, but everything to do with poor management systems. We need to fix this as a matter of urgency, or the trend will continue.

More stringent vehicle checking systems for heavy vehicles? Will this go some way towards solving the risks of heavy vehicles on our roads, and the potential for loss of life that they hold? How would you enforce this when the only people available to perform this takes bribes around every corner. As a fleet manager for a large national carrier, I have had to



authorize many payments to officials how discovered some defect on one of our fleet and then refused to allow the vehicle to continue, unless a R3000.00 p bribe is paid. These are the realities we face. There must be a combined effort on the part of transport operators, drivers and the authorities to stem this problem, as it is only going to get worse unless something is being done.

But what? How? When? By whom? At what cost? Let's start at the end.

It really does not matter what it costs. Hundreds of families a week are being effected by what is happening on our roads. The cost of road deaths is astronomical when seen from a national perspective. Loss in productivity, recruitment and training costs of replacement staff, the trauma to families, the enormous cost of advanced medical care, emergency responses to accidents...the list goes on and on. The money to deal with these matters exists within the savings that can be and will be generated by a dedicated, coordinated and synchronized effort on the parts of the authorities and private enterprise, along with civic organizations that operate close to the problem. There are simply too many organizations waving the same flags, but protesting on different streets, resulting in a fragmented effort to deal with the problem.

Is the K53 test still relevant? I mean, does it really prepare a young driver for his or her responsibilities once they are set free? Is this not something we need to talk about? Is there another way of doing this? Are the regulations governing the operation of public driving schools sufficient to ensure that they produce people who are clearly capable of operating a vehicle on our roads, or do they produce nervously bold drivers with very little spatial awareness, no technical understanding of the true nature of the weapon they hold in their hands, and do they have an understanding of the situational awareness required to be a safe driver? I bet that many of the instructors you will find on our roads have themselves very little understanding of these concepts.

How do we create better conditions on the roads for our truck drivers? Where do they rest, and how do we talk about limiting their driving times, managing their routes better, and warn against overloading? There are regulations that govern these matters, but they do not seem to have any real teeth. Overloading is a daily occurrence, and for too long has the only clearly identified risk been the damage to road surfaces. The risks posed by overloaded trucks goes far beyond the damage to the road. Members of the public who form the vast majority of road users have little understanding of this.

The current situation has an intrinsic indicator that points and suggests the way forward. We cannot eliminate all accidents, but a concentrated effort, properly coordinated and planned, and which is open to adjustment and adaptations along the way, and which strives towards substantially reducing loss of life on the grand scale as we currently have, will certainly make a huge impact on the problem. The public voice which is often the loudest when high profile accidents claim lives, the dedicated involvement of the transport industry, and the support

and commitment from the various authorities is required to launch coordinated campaigns that will then have the potential to make a substantial and measurable difference.

All that is required, is to admit that there is a problem, and then for a few voices who will stand up and be heard.